

A Pathway to Healing for Detransitioners

For Therapists

When an individual transitions, socially and medically, they engage in a process to align their body with their identified sex, changing the secondary characteristics associated with their biological sex. This includes steps that alter the physical body, including hormonal and surgical interventions, as well as those that alter one's social experience, including a change in name and pronouns. In contrast, *detransition* is the process an individual undertakes to reverse these interventions in an attempt to realign psychologically, physically, and socially with their biological sex.

This is a rapidly growing, under served population that the psychotherapy profession is generally unprepared to support. It's become clear that there's a great deal of suffering among those who detransition, much of which stems from having received negligent care from psychotherapists in the past that's resulted in medical harm. GETA is committed to providing training to psychotherapists to ensure that they are adequately trained to work with the complexities of detransition, with care and competence, that range from chronic physical conditions such as endocrine disorders and sexual dysfunction, as well as emotional health challenges such as grief, suicidality, and post-traumatic stress.

For professionals seeking to increase competency working with detransitioners, please reference GETA's events page for upcoming training sessions, and become a member to access previous training recordings that are accessible only to GETA members.

Detransitioners are increasingly seeking psychotherapeutic support, often coming to treatment with complex and unique mental health needs, unresolved trauma both pre- and post-transition, and anger for having been betrayed by medical and mental health professionals. GETA trainings review the most up-to-date research on detransition, and consider typical presentations of those who detransition as well the psychological challenges they may face.

For Detransitioners

If you are a detransitioner, you have good reason to be skeptical of healthcare professionals, and any lost trust you may have towards psychotherapy is understandable. The role of the therapist, in particular, is to engage you in a process of building insight and understanding into the distress you're experiencing while keeping you safe from undue harm. Instead, past therapists mindlessly nodded along to the first conclusions you came to, lacking curiosity and overlooking clinically significant factors, and quickly approved unnecessary, one-size-fits-all interventions.

These interventions have altered your body and impacted your psyche in ways that are difficult to walk back from. You know you need support now, and that psychotherapy, when done well, can be a powerful healing modality. But you're feeling nervous about how your experience will be received by potential therapists. While you're aware that therapists with competence in detransition exist, you're also aware that there are many therapists who meet detransitioners with misunderstanding. At best, they're misinformed, suggesting that working to undo what never should have happened in the first place means you're "on a gender journey," and, at worst, they're defensive, especially if they've green-lit the medical transitions of past patients.

Attempts to reestablish therapeutic care as a detransitioner can be daunting. How do you assess a therapist's understanding of detransition, ensuring your safety and avoiding additional emotional harm? What types of therapy are best suited for you as a detransitioner to help you integrate all of your unique experiences and to stabilize and fortify you as you enter the next chapter of your life? As a detransitioner, what areas of focus are most important for you to prioritize in therapy as your healing work unfolds?

GETA is here to encourage you that all hope is not lost for detransitioners when it comes to psychotherapy.

GETA has a directory of psychotherapists who hold a welcoming, compassionate stance toward detransitioners. We encourage you to look through this directory, to read through each therapist's profile, and to reach out to therapists you sense might be a good fit for you. Most therapists will provide a free fifteen minute consultation prior to working with you to allow for you to get a better feel for them and to learn more about how they work. It can be an empowering step to reach out to clinicians asking for a consultation so you can ask them any questions you may need answered and to get a better feel for whether their practice would be a good fit for you and your needs. Should you not find therapists listed on the directory that are licensed in your state,

email us directly to see if we know of therapists who aren't listed on the directory, but work in your area. Some therapists choose not to be listed on GETA's directory.

Assessing potential new psychotherapists may be an overwhelming task for you to consider undertaking. Thinking of it as an opportunity to take your power back can be helpful. Detransitioning is a painful experience, but like many other challenges that people face in life, it can be a catalyst for greater personal insight and a deeper sense of what your needs are. You may find that you're better equipped now to know what you need in a therapist and to view newfound personal awareness as an asset you can use to screen potential therapists. Doing so, is a means of taking part of your mental health care and healing into your own hands, acknowledging that you have a say in who joins you in your detransition and healing process.

When consulting with potential new therapists, ask them if they have experience working with detransitioners, and if so, whether they have more experience working with detransitioning men or women. This can give you insight into how familiar they are with the complexities inherent in detransitioners like you. It's also helpful to ask how they understand detransition. There may be basic assumptions that a therapist holds about detransition that don't align with your understanding of what detransition is or what it's meant for you. It's important that you feel safe with your therapist, which requires trust. Knowing that your therapist understands detransition in the same way you do is a way to ensure that a foundation of trust can be built in the relationship you forge with them. For instance, if you don't view detransition as a change in gender identity, it's best to not work with a therapist who conceptualizes detransition in such a way.

In addition to GETA, detransitioners can find support through organizations like Genspect or Detrans Foundation. Genspect offers a free virtual support group for detransitioners and aims to provide reduced fee psychotherapy services via an initiative called Beyond Transition. To supplement individual and group therapy, Beyond Transition also offers programs that seek to support detransitioners holistically, across all areas of life, including courses on professional development and life skills. This initiative's programming can be of particular benefit to detransitioners who feel as though they missed out on learning valuable life skills when focused on transitioning. You may feel underdeveloped in areas of life that fall outside the scope of gender, and may benefit from support in areas of higher education, career building, money management, health and wellness, or interpersonal relationships.

If you're unable to find a therapist through GETA, Genspect, or another organization that's explicit about their competency in detransition, we recommend finding a

trained psychoanalyst or a trauma specialist that is mind-body, and holistically informed. It's possible that a psychoanalytic institute exists in your city, and quite often these institutes offer low cost psychoanalytic treatment that's conducted by their analysts in training. Alternatively, skilled trauma therapists can be found on the websites of trauma therapy institutes. There are different kinds of trauma therapies including Accelerated Experiential Dynamic Psychotherapy, Internal Family Systems, Sensorimotor Psychotherapy, Hakomi Method, and Somatic Experiencing. These therapies tend to attract therapists who honor the wisdom of the body, and as a result are likely to be understanding and compassionate to those who have experienced medical trauma; though you do have to do much more vetting here, and, even with a therapist who is open and compassionate, you may find that this is the first time they've worked with a detransitioner.

For those who are in need of a new medical physician, whether as a primary care doctor that exists outside the gender world, or an endocrinologist to monitor hormone levels, this will also likely be an area where your physician is new to working with detransitioners. In our experience, the best one can hope for is a doctor who is open and willing to learn. You may find a doctor who isn't entirely in the gender world, but is adjacent to it, perhaps working more generally in LGBT medicine. Expressing your concerns and advocating for yourself, when their immediate understanding of your experience is incorrect, helps to build trust and rapport, as well as forge a collaborative relationship between you and your new doctor as you both seek answers to how best to ensure your health and wellbeing.

The loss and regret associated with detransition is enormously burdensome, especially given the physical impact that's often a consequence of medical interventions. Grief doesn't ever go away, but over time, individuals who carry it grow bigger than the wounds they hold. In other words, grief doesn't shrink in size, but individuals have the capacity to grow bigger than the grief as they heal. This is possible for every detransitioner. Outside of therapy sessions, there are many ways that you can help facilitate this process. Reconnecting with your body, through implementing movement practices and eating nourishing food, can be an essential part of a detransitioner's healing process, especially for those whose transition was marked by a dissociation from the physical body.

You may find working to embody yourself physically to be a very healing process. Research shows that trauma is stored in the body, therefore, engaging the body on a daily basis can be an important consideration for working through post-traumatic stress responses outside of therapy. Many detransitioners have found yoga and weight lifting to be useful ways of doing this. Outdoor activities that engage the body such

as hiking and swimming are also beneficial in that they get you into nature which is soothing and grounding. Sometimes writing can be a useful way of soothing the nervous system, and journaling practices can go a long way in so far as processing past experiences, teasing out and making sense of confusing thoughts and feelings, and getting clear on lessons learned and what you're working on for your life currently, so your future self is set up to be as content and happy as possible.

Two other soothing practices to consider are meditation and breathwork. Both help to ground you into the present moment and manage any compulsive or fearful thoughts about the past and future. Apps like Insight Timer and Breathwrk can support you in implementing these two practices. Sleep is another important factor to consider when it comes to healing and moving through a detransition. Some detransitioners are plagued by sleep disturbances or full on insomnia. If you struggle with sleep, arming yourself with information on how to improve it can be yet another way to empower yourself. The Toolkit for Sleep at Huberman Lab can be a helpful resource for learning about how to regulate sleep.

When recovering from a traumatic experience, reading can be helpful as well. Below, we have included a list of books that could be useful supplements to your process.

Healing is an individual journey. There are no shortcuts and no easy recipes. You will have to chart your own course, but there are resources to help. Other detransitioners before you have healed. Even though there may be pain and loss that can never entirely go away, you can go on to live a life full of love, purpose, meaning, and adventure.

Recommended book list

The Wisdom of Your Body: Finding Healing, Wholeness, and Connection through Embodied Living by Hilary L. McBride

The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma by Bessel van der Kolk

Building Self-Esteem: How Learning from Shame Helps Us to Grow by Joseph Burgo

Complex PTSD: From Surviving to Thriving by Pete Walker

No Bad Parts: Healing Trauma and Restoring Wholeness with the IFS Model by Richard C. Schwartz

The Myth of Normal: Trauma, Illness, and Healing in a Toxic Culture by Gabor Maté